

*Mrs. Mary*  
"WADDIE;"

A CHRISTMAS  
STORY.

*1904*

BY

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(MRS. BILLINGS.)

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**T**HIS little story is published as  
much to call attention to a beau-  
tiful and deserving charity as to make  
money for its benefit.

THE AUTHOR.

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## "WADDIE,"

A CHRISTMAS STORY.

T was near the close of an autumn day on the prairies. Along the lonely trail leading southward four Indians made their way, their figures silhouetted sharply against the glory of the sunset. The leader, a tall, dignified looking brave, rode a thin, wiry pony, which seemed far too small to carry his weight ; after him came the family pack-horse which carried the belongings, Indian fashion, on two long poles which trailed on the ground behind it, being fastened one on either side of the animal by throngs made of deer-hide. On these poles a heterogeneous collection of articles were fastened, among them blankets, tepee poles, skins, cooking

vessels, and dried meat, while in the midst of them sat a small white child, whose auburn hair and hazel eyes contrasted strangely with the dusky company she was in. An Indian boy was mounted on the pack-horse, and before him was a well grown papoose; following came two squaws, patiently trudging in the steps of the horses which bore their superiors, who preceded them with fitting dignity. Like a living panorama the little party passed along, then, turning off the trail at a point where several dry alkali pools lay, like scars on the bosom of the prairie, headed their silent procession towards the foot-hills in the distance, and were lost in the gathering darkness of the autumn evening.

\* \* \* \* \*

Morning came, bright and clear; a solitary horseman passed along the trail, urging his already jaded horse to extra speed by voice and whip, stopping now and then to cast his eyes over the lonely prairie, or to inspect the trail for foot-prints and the marks of horses' hoofs, which ever and anon,

showing in the soft soil, encouraged him to proceed ; at last these ceased entirely, and with them the lonely horseman's hope of finding what he had pursued with such speed, what he sought so earnestly ; dismounting he patted his jaded beast which had borne him faithfully and well for many weary miles, and laying his head on the creature's shaggy mane, wept like a child. A man shedding tears is a pitiful sight at any time, but pen cannot describe the pathos of that solitary figure on the lonely prairie with only his dumb friend and the blue sky above to witness his misery. He was an old white-haired man, this wanderer from the haunts of man—old and well stricken in years—though still the possessor of keen bright eyes and an erect figure.

“My baby! My Nellie's baby!” he cried.  
“My God! If I but knew that you are dead! My little girl! My darling! How can we go back to her, Bonnie,”—this to the horse which rubbed its head affectionately against him, as if in sympathy—  
“and tell her that we cannot find the baby? O

God! This is too hard to bear, Bonnie." Mounting his horse slowly, the old man turned northward over the trail he had come, and was soon lost to sight in the vastness of the great silent land.

\* \* \* \* \*

Rex Tresdall stood at the door of his dug-out kicking the snow off his boots after a visit to his cattle-sheds close by. It was a bitter cold day in December, but the air was so pure and clear that it seemed much warmer than it really was, and the sun shone brightly on the unbroken whiteness of snow, which covered the prairie like a shroud as far as the eye could reach. Not that the eye wished to dwell on it long, for beautiful and dazzling though it was, too delayed observance of its shining, seemingly endless glitter was fatal to human sight, as many a poor victim to snow blindness can testify; so Rex turned towards the dug-out to rest his eyes from the glare and having knocked the snow from his boots, opened the door of his humble domicile; a thud, thud behind him caused

him to turn quickly, and to his astonishment he saw an Indian on horseback approaching. An Indian on the move was an unusual sight at this season of the year, for they had all settled in their winter quarters weeks before, so Rex closed the door again, and shading his eyes with his hand, watched the approaching brave with some curiosity, assured that some unusual occurrence must be accountable for his appearance. When about ten feet from the dug-out, the Indian paused in his wild career, reining up his horse until it fell back on its haunches, to stand erect an instant later, still as a statue ; while its rider reconnoitered ; then with a bound, at his command, the beast sprang forward and stood a trembling, quivering thing close by the astonished ranchman. With an "Ugh!" which sounded almost like a curse the brave lifted what appeared to be a bundle of blankets from the pommel of his saddle, and leaning over deposited it at the ranchman's feet. Then with a swerve and a leap, before Rex had time to recover sufficiently from his astonishment to demur at the unceremon-

ious gift, the horse bounded away, and in an incredibly short time, he and his rider were but a speck on the dazzling breast of the boundless prairie. Indulging in some mild profanity, Rex stood gazing down on the bundle, and was about to spurn it with his foot, when it moved, and a piping voice proceeded from its none too clean folds, a voice which said: "Et me out, bad Indin! Et Waddie out!"

Rex promptly proceeded to obey orders, although he was not the person addressed, but he first carried the squirming, protesting bundle into his dug-out as a precaution against the thirty degrees below zero which his thermometer recorded. Wonder of wonders! A pretty white child rewarded his inspection of the bundle, which was carefully tied with leather thongs—a child with auburn hair and hazel eyes, which regarded him with astonishment and approval.

"Bad Indin all gone. Waddie don't wike Indin."

"Where the deuce did you come from?" asked

Rex, as he stood with his arms akimbo, looking down in a dazed fashion at his acquisition.

To this question the child made no reply—her lips quivered, her beautiful eyes filled with tears; looking up at the kindly face of the ranchman she said with a sob: "Waddie wants Mamma!" Now Rex was a man who stood six feet high in his shoeless feet, and he was broad-shouldered in proportion. He had been hardened by prairie life and the company of rough men; he was judged by those with whom he came in contact to be quite devoid of those feelings and sentiments supposed to be left behind when a man deserts civilized communities and commences a struggle for existence in the wild, unsettled territories of the far Northwest, but something in the little pleading face, in the pathetic voice, was "open sesame" to the feelings which had but laid dormant for years. There was a familiarity, too, in the face; it conjured up a memory of a tearful face uplifted to his in the old by-gone days he had tried to forget; it affected him strongly. Down on his knees went the big fellow, and gather-

ing the child to his breast kissed her again and again, whispering meanwhile soft consoling speeches in his own rough way.

"Big Indin nezzer tiss poor Waddie," remarked the small creature when the embrace was over. "Big Indin nezzer dib Waddie a bass, nezzer comb Waddie's culls. You wass Waddie's poor face and comb culls, big man."

When Graham—Rex's factotum—came into the room some time after, he stood transfixed at the door in dumb amazement, for there was the "Boss" down on his knees combing the auburn locks of a very small girl, who was scolding vociferously as each tangle was carefully undone by the inexperienced barber's clumsy fingers.

"Ef I ever!" ejaculated the factotum with an oath. "Whar did *she* cum from? No wonder you was'nt out after ther jumper. I had the roan mare harnessed fur the last hour. Reckoned you'd froze ter death. Gosh! Ain't she a bute though!"

"This is my little girl, Grame; she fell from the sky, or rather from a Sioux saddle," replied Rex,

still proceeding with his hair-dressing operations.

"Waddie tay wiz big man. Waddie woves 'oo." So saying the child reached up her pretty face and kissed him. Rex blushed like a girl. Grame clapped his hands and guffawed loudly.

"Aha! Allus reckoned you'd be a terror with ther girls. Say, little un, ain't yer got a kiss for me?"

Waddie hid her face in her new friend's coat. "No, no, Waddie fighted, don't want to tiss 'oo."

"Then he shan't kiss you; wait until you are better acquainted, Grame," said Rex, soothingly.

"Aye, aye! One ud think you'd brung up a baker's dozen, Boss, ter see you with that ere kid," grunted Grame. "Who owns her, anyways? Say Boss," as a sudden thought struck him, "that there mounted perlice who stopped here more'n a month past left word that them blamed Injins hed took a kid from Aspinwell's ranch, 'cross ther foot-hills yonder. Say, now, could that there be it?"

"But that is more than six weeks ago; he said the child was stolen in October. I had a long

talk with him. A child could hardly live all that time with those dirty beggars. She's pretty clean, too."

"You bet all samee, that air ther kid. I seen ther describement of her on er paper ther perlice hed. Three year ole, light complected. Say, Boss, you air in luck, there's a big reeward fur her."

Rex made no reply, but bent over his charge and fondled her. A wild wish came into his mind that she would not prove to be the child lost from the ranch across the foot-hills, that he might keep her himself, this little girl with her sunny face and auburn curls, this three year old waif of the lonely prairies. Her voice aroused him from his reverie :

"Waddie so seepy, big man. Waddie want to go 'y-lo."

Rex lifted her up gently and carried her over to his bunk on the opposite side of the one room in his scarcely palatial dwelling, and laid her down on the rough coverings ; she shut her eyes, and murmuring something about "big man," fell sound asleep. Rex eyed her admiringly ; Grame watched

him curiously while this ceremony was taking place, then asked :

"Say, war'nt yer neber married, Boss?"

"Never," replied Rex, decidedly.

"Well, all I kin say is, youh a puppah wasted, clean wasted. Yer kerried that ere kid same as its own mother wud a kerried hur."

Rex paid no attention to his factotem's complimentary remarks; he was carefully examining the little sleeper's clothes.

Some of the garments the child had worn at home had evidently been removed and replaced by those worn by Indian children, as the little bead-embroidered cloth trousers and tiny blanket vest indicated, her shoes had given place to mocassins, and a torn piece of what had once been a bright hued blanket was fastened tightly around her shoulders, over the faded blue frock, relic of a mother's handiwork; the child had been warmly clothed by her captors, in their own primitive fashion. At last Rex, looking up at Grame, said:

"See here, you are right, look!" Grame ex-

amined the little petticoat the child wore, and there saw what Rex drew his attention to ; soiled though the garment was, he read plainly marked in ink, 'Gladys Aspinwell.'

"Sure enough, you are right, man, it *is* the child the police searched for for weeks ; they said they had been through every camp and tepee for miles around."

"Aye, aye!" replied Grame, "but they can't ketch them devils nappin.' Reckon they dropped ther kid now 'cause it got too hot fur them."

"Well, its the Aspinwell lost baby sure. Say Grame!" Rex caught hold of the astonished factotem, and nearly shook the breath out of him. "Day after to-morrow is Christmas day. By George, I'd nearly forgotten it. We will take her home then. Won't they be wild with joy! What a present it will be. We will give them a surprise."

Grame looked up into the Boss's face ; Rex had never seen him look that way before ; a change had come over the old man's countenance. "Say Boss," he said softly, you ain't hed no kids, so





you can't know how they'd feel. Nigh on thirty year ago I lost a little un like that ere—she died. Nigh on thirty year ago"—he added (as if to himself), "yet oftimes now I kinder think I kin hear her voice, and the trot of her little feet near me, when I'm mindin' them dum critters er yourn on ther prairie. Mebbe its fancy ; Aye, Aye, mabye, but I kin never forget my little girlie I lost so long ago." Grame turned on his heel with a sigh which sounded like a sob, and left the room quickly. Then there came into Rex's mind part of a text he had learned at his mother's knee. "A little child shall lead them." Yes, indeed, this little child who had come so unexpectedly to his prairie home had led old Grame, whom everybody thought to be so hard and unfeeling, to show the soft side of his warped nature, and Rex ruminated as he stroked the hair he had so laboriously combed a few minutes before ; she had led him, Rex, to remember Christmas—the Christmas he had so nearly forgotten—the Christmas he had promised someone to keep—a someone who now slept peacefully

under the yews in the old English Churchyard so far away!—A someone who had loved him as none other ever would love him—his mother.

“God bless you, little one,” he whispered softly to the sleeping child. “You shall go home in time for Christmas morning.” Then in a vague way he set to wondering how long a time it was since he had said “God bless you!” to any one. Years of prairie life—lonely isolated life in the company of cowboys and half-breeds, had made Rex Tresdell forget many things ere this little sleeping child proved the key to his memory, and set him thinking of the times at home, long, long ago.

\* \* \* \* \*

Christmas morning at Aspinwell ranch, far out on the prairie beyond the foothills; clear, cold, bright snow, sparkling like diamonds wherever the eye could reach. A typical Christmas in the great lonely land. But the day of days brought sorrow to the lonely party of two at the ranch. It reminded them of a little child who was missing, who

had looked forward for weeks before she was taken from them, to the wonderful box expected from the east, which Santa Claus had promised to send. Alas! The box had come, but where was little Gladys, their pet and pride?

Kneeling by her father's side, her face buried in his lap, the stricken mother wept bitterly, and the old, white-haired man, he who had gone so many miles in fruitless pursuit of the Indians whom he fancied might have stolen the child that Autumn morning, stroked her hair fondly and tried with broken voice to console her.

"We may yet find her, dear," he said, tenderly. "All the police are notified: the reward, too, may stir up the country."

"No, never, never. She was all I had but you, father. She is dead, I know my darling is dead."

Neither of the two noticed that the door opened softly, and that a tall stranger, carrying what appeared to be a buffalo skin rolled in a bundle, entered and tiptoed noiselessly to a wide settee near the window—for Aspinwell ranch was a well-to-do

station, and possessed comforts unusual in the Northwest—and unrolled the skin carefully ; then coughing to attract the attention of the two mourners, who looked up astonished at his presence, he took a step towards them, and pointing to the bundle he had unrolled, said nervously :

“Please accept a Christmas Box, lady.”

The woman rose to her feet and stared at him, then with a hysterical laugh, she said :

“We are not in the humor for Christmas gifts here, Sir, my father and I. But, but—I know *you*.”

Rex took the hand she extended and led her to the bed.

“Nellie,” he said, his voice broken with emotion, “to think that *I* should have brought you back your baby.”

There was a scream, a cry of joy, and Eleanor Aspinwell held her lost child to her breast.

“So strange, Rex, my boy, that you should have brought back Nellie’s baby to her. I did not recognise you for a few moments. Its ten long years

since Nellie and I last saw you, remember, and five years since she married that scamp Aspinwell," said Nellie's father, when some of the excitement had abated.

"And he?" queried Rex anxiously.

"Was killed in a drunken row at Regina just after little 'Waddie,' as she calls herself, was born, three years ago. We came here after that and have lived here ever since, but we had no idea that you were so near us. I often think things would have turned out differently if you had not gone away, Rex, but of course after your mother's death, it was the best thing you could do. Aspinwell told Nellie that you were dead, and professed to know all the particulars, but we heard several years ago that it was not true, that you were still living."

"So that was why I never heard from Nellie after I left California," said Rex meditatively. "I could not make it out." He could have added that the suspicion of his old sweetheart's perfidy had made him choose the lonely life on the ranch

that he had led for years. "I wrote twice, but received no answer."

"Why we must have left England. We have been in Canada for seven years or more. You and Nellie must talk it over. She has often spoken of you, Rex."

Rex looked longingly towards the settee, where any amount of petting and kissing was taking place. Somehow he realized all of a sudden what a lonely life he had been leading all these years, and what love and happiness he had missed in his voluntary exile. He walked over to the settee. "Well, Miss Waddie," he said gaily, "you've forgotten me already; I'm very jealous. For the last few days you have lavished all your love and affection on me."

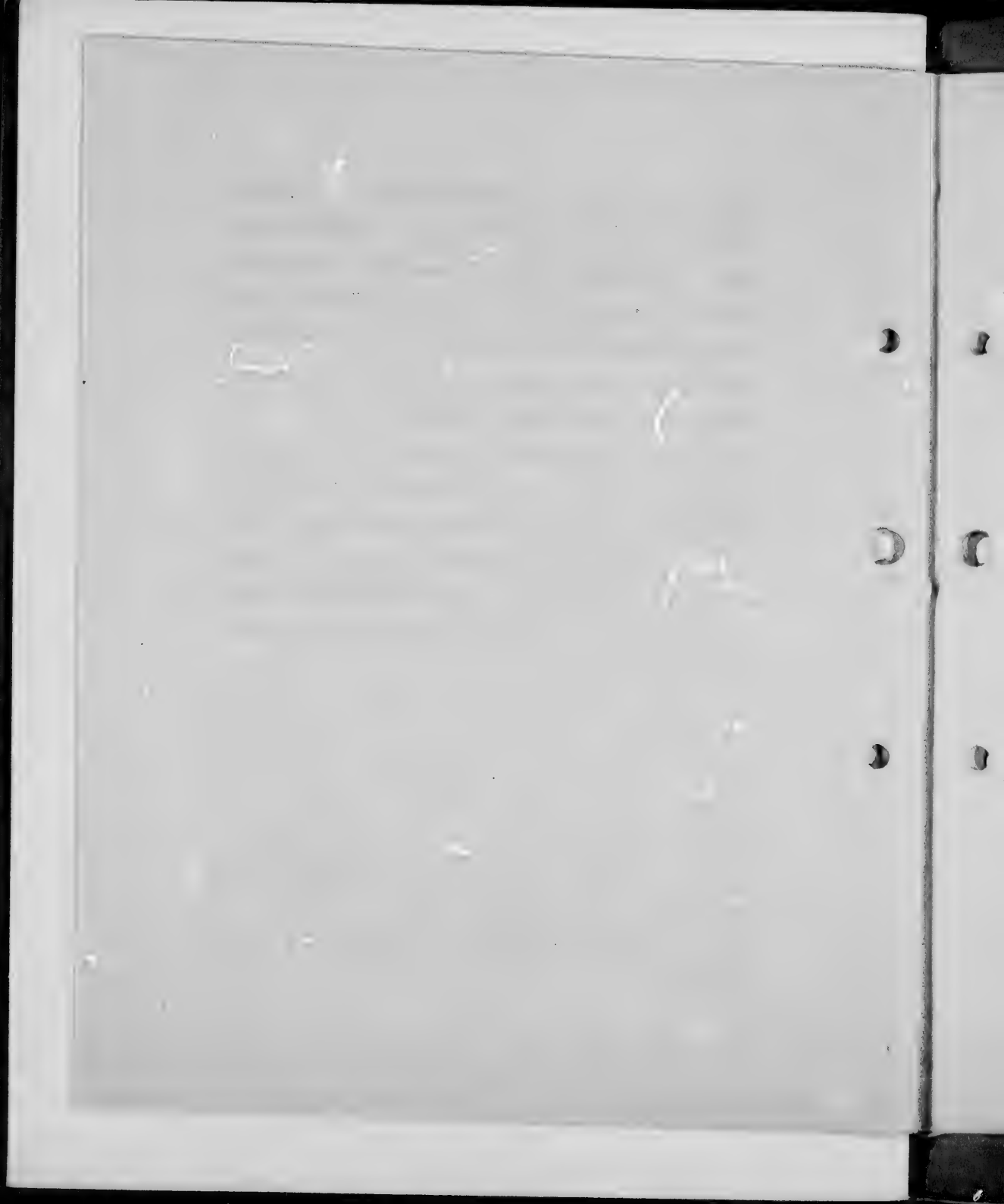
"Oh dear wuvly big man," said the child, throwing her arms round Rex's neck, thereby nearly precipitating herself from her mother's arms and bringing two blushing faces very close together, "I do wuv you." Then kissing the bronzed cheek again and again, she looked at her mother and

said, as she patted her cheek gently, "Oo tan tiss Waddie's big man too, Mamma." Nellie looked down. Rex regarded her quiscally, then putting his hand under her chin, raised her blushing face and kissed her right on the lips. "For Waddie's sake and old times sake, too, Nellie," he whispered softly. "Not entirely to please Waddie."

The Christmas sun shone in through the window in a blaze of light. The grandfather sat regarding the tableau before him with astonishment. What he thought is not recorded, but may be easily imagined. He boasted afterwards that he made a prophecy which was fulfilled inside of three months.

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"Waddie" is a name of the past now ; Gladys suits the little girl who calls a tall, fine fellow who measures over six feet in height "Daddy" much better. Yet strange to say she is always "Waddie" to this "Daddy" who loves her so fondly, although her mother often tells him that "Waddie" is a most undignified name for a tall young lady of seven.



**The Dead Baby's Message.**

**A CHRISTMAS ETCHING.**



## THE DEAD BABY'S MESSAGE.

A CHRISTMAS ETCHING.

"Where did you come from, baby dear?  
Out of the nowhere into here."



It is a real old-fashioned Christmas Eve—  
snow, sleigh bells, cold, clear weather,  
all complete. Everyone seems happy,  
too happy to notice a pale woman in deep mourn-  
ing who walks slowly down the street, jostled and  
elbowed by the merry pedestrians intent on Christ-  
mas shopping.

What wonder if her heart is sad, her thoughts  
bitter? What to her is Christmas Eve, with its  
Santa Claus, its toys, its rejoicing? Her arms are  
empty, her heart has a vacant shrine, where but a  
few months ago a little presence dwelt. On, on  
she walks through the crowded streets, avoiding the

stores with their windows full of toys, dolls and sweet-meats ; then, turning into a quieter thoroughfare, pauses irresolutely at the entrance of a large hospital. Yes, she will go in—she will go in and see people more unhappy than herself.

Past cot after cot, dry-eyed, with set lips she passes, but pauses at one which has a very small occupant. So tiny, so blue-eyed, so smiling. "Nobody's child," the nurse who has followed her says gently. Then the heart of the childless woman rebels within her. "Nobody's baby"? Who would have cared if *it* had died? Yet her baby, her blue-eyed beautiful boy has been taken from her. She almost hates the little waif as she gazes down upon it with questioning eyes. This baby, uncared for, deserted, alone in the world. But the baby smiles at her—was there ever anything so beautiful as a baby's smile? The tiny thing is warm and comfortable, well-fed and petted ; it never knew what want and comfort, good food and petting was before, although this is its birthday, the first anniversary of its entrance into a world where no love

had awaited it. So tiny, so blue-eyed, so smiling. Without a word the woman turns away.

An hour later someone is standing by a little snow-covered grave in the cemetery. She wonders how she ever dreaded the thought of the beautiful snow blanket over the little mound. It is so white, so peaceful, so pure, so like the little soul that flew back to the "Nowhere" from whence it came. She stoops down and measures the depth of the snowy covering with her fingers—something is there; she feels a little blade and digs the snow carefully away. A week of warm days, just passed, has tempted a crocus to take a peep at the sun. There it is, its little bud waiting under the friendly blanket to unfold its purple petals. "Is it a message? O! is it a message from you, my blessed baby?" she cries. It may be that she hears an answer? How do we know? Mother love is strong and God is merciful. Her burden of sorrow seems lighter as she leaves the snow-decked home of the dead.

"Nobody's baby" has a home; it is somebody's

baby now. The cot in the hospital where it laid and cooed its appreciation of warmth, and comfort, and notice, is empty. Far away in the great "Nowhere," safe in angels' keeping, a child spirit waits and watches. Its message has been heeded, the message sent by the little crocus hidden under the snow blanket. One woman is saved from sorrow and despair by the magic of a baby's smile. As the snow blanket shelters and protects the crocus on the little grave, so will she love and protect the little waif. This is mother's love interpretation of the dead baby's message.

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